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READERS

THE

SANDMAN

Brief lives

written by

NEIL GAIMAN

illustrated by

JILL THOMPSON

and

VINCE LOCKE

She...

She has decided she no longer loves me.

LORD?

MY LORD, YOU ASKED TO BE TOLD WHEN THE YOUNG LADY HAD LEFT THE CASTLE.

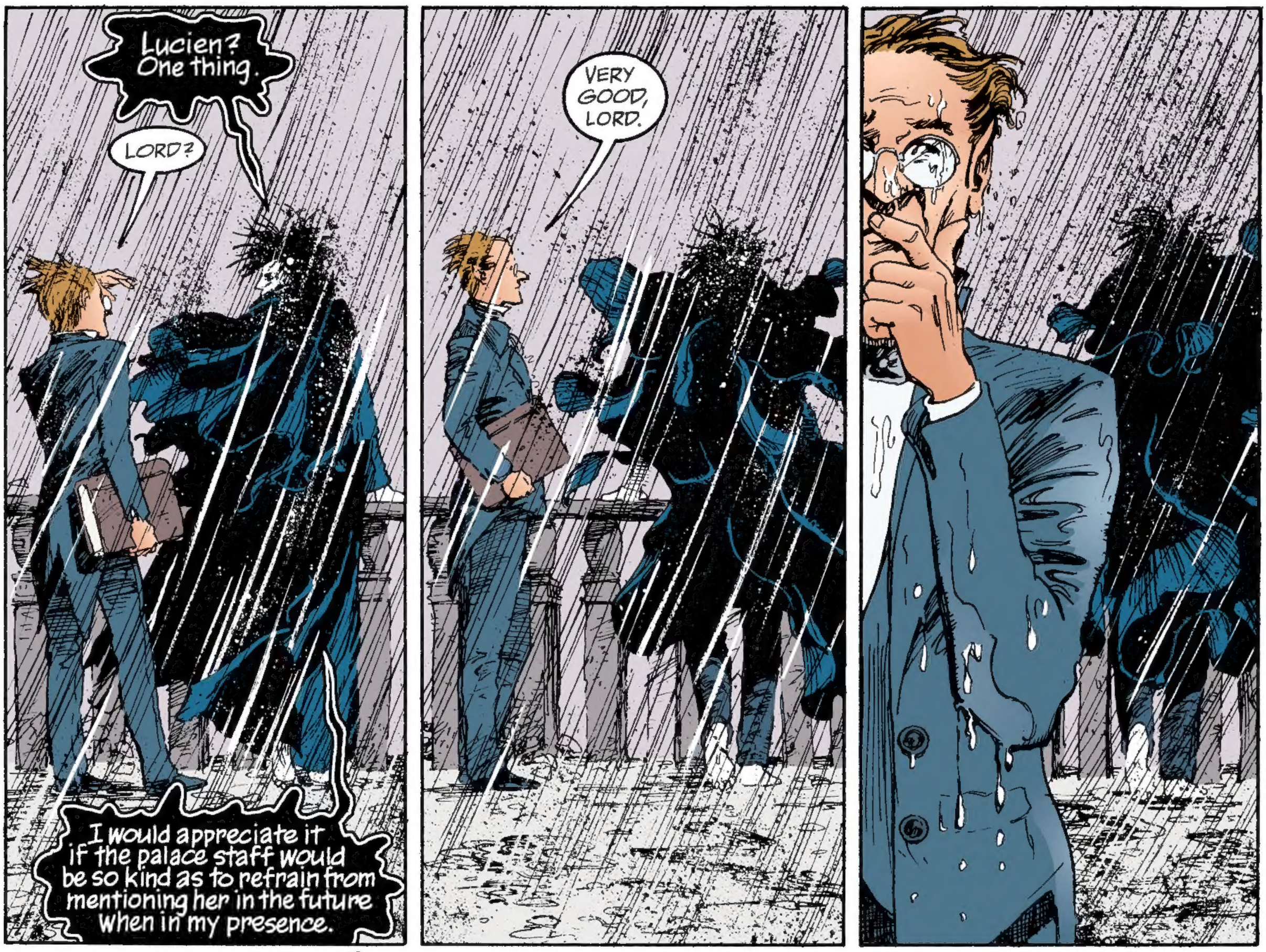
YES, WELL. SHE'S *GONE*. ON HER WAY BACK TO THE WAKING WORLD.

AND THE, UH, THE PALACE STAFF WERE WONDERING, LORD...

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE DONE WITH THE SUITE OF *ROOMS* YOU CREATED FOR HER?

Erase them.

TWO: IT ALWAYS RAINS ON THE UNLOVED—WET DREAMS—A FISHING EXPEDITION—SHE KISSES WYVERNS (THE DISNEY-LAND ANALOGY)—DINNER ETIQUETTE AND CHOCOLATE LOVERS—DESIRE SWEARS BY THE FIRST CIRCLE—"THINGS ARE CHANGING"—WHAT CAN POSSIBLY GO WRONG?


Lucien? One thing.
LORD?
I would appreciate it if the palace staff would be so kind as to refrain from mentioning her in the future when in my presence.
VERY GOOD, LORD.

THE SANDMAN

featuring characters created by Gaiman, Kieth and Dringenberg

Neil Gaiman, writer; Jill Thompson and Vince Locke, artists; Danny Vozzo, colors; Todd Klein, lettering; Karen Berger, editor; and introducing Lisa Aufenanger, assistant editor.

WELL, I SPOKE TO HIM ABOUT THE ROOMS.

HE WANTS THEM ERASED. *HMM.* TO BE ON THE SAFE SIDE YOU'D BETTER REMOVE THAT WHOLE WING OF THE CASTLE.

AND HE *DOESN'T* WANT TO BE REMINDED OF HER.

DON'T SAY HER NAME. DON'T *MENTION* HER UNLESS HE MENTIONS HER FIRST, WHICH HE *WON'T*-- AND EVEN IF HE *DOES*, PRETEND THAT *YOU'VE* FORGOTTEN SHE EVER EXISTED.

PASS THE WORD ALONG.

UM. MISTER *LUCIEN?* SHE GAVE ME *THIS.* WHEN SHE WAS LEAVING. AS A PRESENT. FOR BEING HER MAID.

IT'S *REALLY* PRETTY. AND SHE WAS *SO* NICE TO ME. CAN'T I KEEP IT?

PLEASE, MISTER LUCIEN?

BOOM

I SUPPOSE SO, NUALA. BUT DON'T LET *HIM* SEE IT.

BRRRR. LISTEN TO THAT THUNDER.

POOR LORD MORPHEUS. HE MUST BE VERY *SAD.*

NAH. HE ENJOYS IT.

I MEAN, HELL, IT'S A POSE. Y'KNOW?

HE SPENDS A COUPLA MONTHS HANGING OUT WITH A NEW BROAD. THEN ONE DAY THE MAGIC'S WORN OFF, AND HE GOES BACK TO WORK, AND SHE TAKES A HIKE.

=PHHHHT.=

NOW, GUYS LIKE ME, ORDINARY JOES, WE JUST SHRUG OUR SHOULDERS, SAY, HEY, THAT'S LIFE, FLICK IT IF YOU CAN'T TAKE A JOKE.

NOT HIM. OH NO. HE'S GOTTA BE THE TRAGIC FIGURE STANDING OUT IN THE RAIN, MOURNIN' THE LOSS OF HIS BELOVED. SO DOWN COMES THE RAIN, RIGHT ON CUE.

IN THE MEANTIME EVERYBODY GETS DREAMS FULLA EXISTENTIAL ANGST AND WAKES UP FEELING LIKE HELL.

AND WE ALL GET WET.

I'M SURE WE'RE ALL GRATEFUL FOR THOSE PRICELESS GEMS OF WISDOM, MERVYN.

HEY, I SPEAK MY MIND, LOOSH. YOU GOTTA PROBLEM WITH THAT?

I DO FEEL SORRY FOR HIM. HE REALLY LIKED HER.

AND WHY DO MY GUYS HAVE TO DISMANTLE THE WHOLE *WING*? HELL, *HE* COULD VANISH IT INNA *BLINK*.

BLINK! IT'S GONE!

LIKE *THAT*.

WELL, HE'S ON THE BALCONY OUTSIDE HIS QUARTERS, MERVYN.

WHY DON'T YOU GO UP THERE *NOW*, AND *SUGGEST* IT TO HIM?

BA-BOOM

OOOKAY. I'LL GO GATHER THE WRECKING CREW.

SEEYA, TOOTS. LATER, LOOSH.

LUCIEN? YOU'VE KNOWN HIM FOR A LONG TIME...

HE REALLY *DID* LIKE HER, DIDN'T HE?

YES, MY DEAR.

I'M *VERY* MUCH AFRAID THAT HE *DID*.

...IT'S BEEN A WHOLE WEEK, FOR CHRISSAKES! ISN'T HE TIRED OF RAIN YET?

I VERY MUCH DOUBT IT, MATTHEW.

SO, ANY IDEA HOW LONG IT'LL TAKE HIM TO GET OVER THIS?

I MEAN, DOES THIS ALWAYS HAPPEN WHEN A GIRLFRIEND WALKS OUT ON HIM?

NOT AT ALL. FOR EXAMPLE, AFTER THE NADA AFFAIR HE RAZED THE DREAMING. IT WAS A BLEAK, LONELY DESERT FOR CENTURIES.

I REMEMBER THE FIRST FLOWER THAT GREW. THE FIRST TIME HE SMILED AGAIN...

CALLIOPE? WELL, THAT AFFAIR HAD RUN ITS COURSE FOR BOTH OF THEM. HE MOPED A BIT, BUT I THINK ON THE WHOLE HE WAS RELIEVED.

POOR DEAR ELEANORA...? HMM. HE THREW HIMSELF INTO HIS WORK AFTER THAT ONE BIT THE DUST. HE WOVE DREAMS AND CRAFTED NIGHTMARES FOR A HUNDRED YEARS, SCARCELY RAISING HIS HEAD.

SO, NO, THIS ISN'T USUAL.

BUT THEN, WHAT IS?

I NEVER LIKED HER. I KNEW SHE'D DO SOMETHING LIKE THIS.

YOU KNOW, I WENT UP THERE AND TRIED TO SNAP HIM OUT OF IT. I MEAN, I WAS UP THERE FOR LIKE, HOURS.

OH YES?

WENT DOWN LIKE A DEAD BALLOON.

YOU KNOW WHAT HE SAID TO ME?

NO.

"NOTHING."

"ABSOLUTELY NOTHING."

UH, OKAY, MM GOLDIE.

THE UH SUHSOMETHING NASTY IN THE MM SUB-BASEMENT SAYS IT ER DOESN'T MUHMUH *MIND* BERBEING UNDERWATER.

IT SUH*SORT* OF, HMM, *LIKES* IT EVEN.

YOU ER LEARN SOMETHING NEW EVERY DUH-*DAY*.

TWENTY-ONE DAYS OF, HH, SOLID RAIN. *JUST* WHAT WE NEEDED--I UH DUH*DON'T* THINK.

ARE YOU UH ALL *RIGHT* UP THERE?

urkle.

WELL, I'VE MUHMADE *LOTS* OF SANDWICHES. ENOUGH FOR ANOTHER TUH-*TWO* WEEKS. AND I'VE BUH-BROUGHT MY, ER, FISHING ROD. AND YOU'VE GOT YUH-*YOUR* FISHING ROD.

HAS THE B-B-BOTTLE IMP GOT *ITS* FUHFISHING ROD?

Glurk.

HAH! WE'LL HAVE FUN, WER*WON'T* WE? WE CAN S-SING LITTLE MM *SONGS* TO EACH OTHER. *YES?*

YAAARR!

SNAP

meep?

PUH-PUH-PACK UP YOUR TROUBLES IN YOUR MM HM ER OLD KIT BAG AND SMILE, SMILE, SMILE...

NEARLY THERE...

This is foolish...

Why do I hurt so?

I scarcely knew her.

A handful of months, little more...

I would have given her worlds of her own, strung like sapphires and emeralds on a silken cord.

I would have given her...

I keep thinking of her eyes, toward the end. Cold eyes, weighing me dispassionately, finding me wanting...

And in the end, she told me. But I knew before she told me. It was there in her eyes.

She had decided she no longer loved me.

MY LORD? WE HAVE CAPTURED AN INTRUDER.

SO?

MY LORD. SHE *CLAIMS* TO BE YOUR SISTER.

HERE SHE IS, MY LORD. THE INTRUDER. WE HAVE HER SAFE.

FHEE *FHED* FHEE WOV WOR FHIFHTER

I'm afraid she IS my sister, Wyvern. Put her down.

WHEEEE!

Gently.

WHEEEE!

MY-- MY LADY-- I MUST-- I--HAD I BUT KNOWN-- I THOUGHT--

S'OKAY. I MEAN, I LIKED IT. IT WAS LIKE DISNEYLAND.

I ESPECIALLY LIKED THE SWINGING BIT.

Delirium.

What are you doing here?

I CAME TO SEE YOU. I MEAN I WANTED TO TALK TOO. NOT JUST SEE

Why didn't you call me? You have a gallery.

I DIDN'T WANT TO.

IF I CALLED AND YOU SAID NO THEN THAT WOULD MEAN YOU WOULDN'T TALK TO ME AND THE LAST TIME I CALLED YOU YOU SAID NO AND THE TIME BEFORE THAT SO I THOUGHT YOU PROBABLY DIDN'T WANT TO TALK TO. ME. SO I THOUGHT IF I JUST TURNED UP THEN...

PLEASE DON'T MAKE ME GO AWAY.

Are you hungry?

...MAYBE.

Very good. I will find us something to eat.

Please. Sit.

THANK YOU.

UM. DON'T YOU WANT TO KNOW WHY I CAME HERE?

That can wait until we have eaten, surely?

OH YES.

WHAT WILL YOU HAVE, MA'AM?

HAVE YOU GOT ANY LITTLE MILK CHOCOLATE PEOPLE? ABOUT THREE INCHES HIGH? MEN AND WOMEN? I'D LIKE SOME OF THEM FILLED WITH RASPBERRY CREAM.

VERY GOOD, MA'AM. AND TO DRINK?

FRESH MANGO JUICE, PLEASE.

An omelette, a light salad, and a glass of white wine for me, Taramis.

AS YOU WILL, SIR.

UM. HAVE YOU SEEN ANY OF THE FAMILY RECENTLY?

I HAVE. I SAW DESPAIR AND DESIRE.

FINE. JUST FINE.

NO.

Ah. And how are they?

Ah.

I SAW IT WAS RAINING OUTSIDE. WATER. OR WHAT IT RAINS IN DREAMS, ANYWAY.

Yes.

YOU MUST BE IN A VERY BAD MOOD.

Must I?

DINNER IS SERVED, SIR.

Thank you, Taramis.

OH, LOOK! THEY'VE ALL GOT LITTLE EYEBROWS.

FIRST OF ALL I BITE THEIR LITTLE HANDS OFF, ONE TWO THREE... THEN I BITE THEIR LITTLE NOSES...

Indeed.

LOOK. THESE TWO ARE MAKING LO-OVE...

K. I. S. S. I. N. G.

Stop that.

SORRY...

UM. THEY WEREN'T REALLY KISSING. THEY WERE UM.

IT'S OKAY. I'M FINISHED. MOSTLY. THEY'VE GONE ALL STICKY ANYWAY. AND I DON'T LIKE MANGO JUICE.

IT'S YECCHY.

KISSING.

SQUIDGING.

Is this formal family business, sisterz.

WHATEVER.

THEY LEAVE THAT PLACE, ALMOST IMPERCEPTIBLY.

TOUCHED BY HER FINGERS, THE TWO SURVIVING CHOCOLATE PEOPLE COPULATE DESPERATELY, LOSING THEMSELVES IN A MELTING FRENZY OF LUST, SPENDING THE LAST OF THEIR BRIEF BORROWED LIVES IN A SPASM OF RASPBERRY CREAM AND FEAR.

OH YES, I THINK. I MEAN KIND OF. MOSTLY. MAYBE.

Then I think my Gallery might well be the best place to conduct discussions, don't you?

Now, what exactly do you wish to talk to me about?

Delirium? You are beginning to try my patience.

Is... something the matter?

Little sister, what exactly is the problem?

Snork

TH-THANK YOU.

Here. Use this.

And wipe your nose.

I WAS AFRAID YOU'D PROBABLY BE ALL HORRIBLE TO ME, AND. YOU'RE SO SCARY, SO I THOUGHT I'D REALLY TRY TO BE GOOD AND I WAS TRYING SO HARD TO BE GOOD AND YOU WERE STILL BEING HORRID TO ME AND I WAS DOING MY BEST AND THEN I MESSED IT ALL UP AND NOW YOU'LL SAY NO AND BE HORRIBLE AND IT'S ALL A MESS AND IT'S MY FAULT.

I.... I'm sorry.

I've been a little distracted recently.

I wasn't angry with you, sister.

If I have behaved badly, as your host, then please, accept my apologies.

ARE YOU MAKING FUN OF ME?

ARE YOU?

Why would I do that?

ALL THAT APOLOGIZING.

YOU'VE NEVER APOLOGIZED TO ME. YOU JUST ACT LIKE YOU KNOW STUFF I DON'T KNOW THAT MAKES EVERYTHING YOU DO OKAY.

I see. Well, I have apologized. And I was not making fun of you.

Now, why don't you tell me why you came here.

I WAS THINKING ABOUT, THINGS. AND I WAS THINKING THAT WE SHOULD GO AND FIND OUR BROTHER.

Yes?

WELL, I MISS HIM. AND HE COULD BE HURT OR SOMETHING AND WE SHOULD DO SOMETHING.

So?

THAT WAS JUST WHAT DESPAIR SAID. SHE SAID "SO?"

You've asked her, then?

YES. SHE SAID NO. SHE SAID YOU'D SAY NO, TOO.

And Desire? I take it you asked Desire as well.

OH YES.

I WAS IN DESIRE'S HOUSE WHEN I HAD THE IDEA.

I'm sure you were.

SO WILL YOU COME WITH ME TO LOOK FOR HIM? PLEASE?

Will you excuse me for one moment?

I S'PPOSE SO.

Desire? I stand in my Gallery, I hold your sigil. Will you answer me?

DREAM? IT'S BEEN TWO *YEARS* SINCE I LAST SAW YOU.

AT THAT LITTLE FAMILY GET-TOGETHER. REMEMBER?

OF *COURSE* YOU DO.

Delirium is in my realm.

YES. I THOUGHT SHE'D BE ARRIVING SOONER OR LATER. IT'S TAKEN HER LONGER THAN I THOUGHT TO GET THE NERVE UP, THOUGH. ARE YOU COMING *THROUGH?*

No. I'll stay between realms, if you have no objection.

SUIT YOURSELF.

She wants to find our lost brother.

I KNOW.

This affair has your marks all over it, Desire. She tells me she decided on this idiotic course while in your domain.

SHE DID.

BUT I HAD *NOTHING* TO DO WITH IT.

And I suppose you had nothing to do with my recent troubles?

YOUR LITTLE AFFAIR, AND ITS MESSY ENDING?

I *HATE* TO DISAPPOINT YOU, DREAM, BUT YOU MANAGED TO SCREW THAT ONE UP *ALL* ON YOUR OWN.

ALTHOUGH I DID FIND IT *EXTREMELY* AMUSING.

Are you telling the whole truth?

I'M AFRAID SO.

YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME, *DO* YOU?

NO.

VERY WELL. I HAVE TOLD YOU THE TRUTH: I *SWEAR* IT BY MY *HEART*. THERE. SATISFIED?

Will you swear it by the first circle?

HMM. *THAT* TAKES ME BACK.

BUT *YES*: I SWEAR BY THE FIRST CIRCLE. AND BY THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SKY. AND BY THE SWORD AND THE--

Enough!

I JUST WANTED TO SHOW YOU I WAS SERIOUS.

AND I *AM*.

NEITHER DELIRIUM'S NEW OBSESSION NOR YOUR LITTLE HEARTBREAK ARE OF MY DOING.

NOW. *SOME* OF US HAVE BUSINESS TO ATTEND TO.

SO WHY DON'T YOU GO *BACK* TO YOUR GALLERY, TELL THE LITTLE GLEET TO *BUZZ* OFF AND BOTHER SOMEONE ELSE, SO *YOU* CAN GET BACK TO FEELING *SORRY* FOR YOURSELF?

Hmm.

DELIRIUM STANDS IN DREAM'S GALLERY, WAITING FOR HIS RETURN. REMEMBERING:

THE MOMENT SHE REALIZED WHAT WAS HAPPENING, THAT THE UNIVERSE WAS CHANGING, THAT SHE WAS GROWING UP OR AT LEAST GROWING OLDER...

SHE WAS NO LONGER DELIGHT; AND THE BLOSSOMS HAD ALREADY BEGUN TO FALL IN HER DOMAIN, BECOMING SMUDGED AND FORMLESS COLORS, AND SHE HAD NO ONE TO TALK TO...

THEN SHE WENT TO SEE HIM. SHE REMEMBERS THE LIGHT GLINTING GOLD IN HIS BEARD AND EYELASHES. AND HE PUT HIS ARM AROUND HER SHOULDERS AND THEY STOOD ON THE HILL (BECAUSE THIS WAS ON EARTH IN THE DAWN DAYS, EVEN THEN HE SPENT A LOT OF TIME ON EARTH).

AND HE SAID, "DEL, IT'S OKAY." AND THEN HE SHUT UP, AND THEN SHE STARTED GIGGLING UNCONTROLLABLY, AND HE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING, HE JUST HELD HER UNTIL SHE GAINED CONTROL ONCE MORE. THEY WATCHED THE SUNSET FOR A BIT.

THEN HE SAID, "DEL. THINGS ARE CHANGING."

SHE KNEW IT WAS TRUE.

AND THERE WAS NOTHING SHE COULD DO ABOUT IT.

Little sister?

Oh. You're back.

Yes.

I was thinking. I can do that. Think. Still do that. I mean, even when I forget how to... how to...

What was I saying?

I have spoken to Desire.

Yes. I've done that, too.

Dream?

Yes.

I was lying to you. Earlier. What I said. It wasn't true.

Really?

Yeees. I do like mango juice really.

If you were to seek our brother, where would you start looking?

Um. I don't know.

I suppose I'd start by finding his old friends and asking them if they knew. I mean, I'd ask them really nicely.

Did you know any of his friends?

A few.

He's been gone three hundred years.

I MADE A LIST OF HIS FRIENDS I KNEW. I WROTE IT MYSELF. IN WRITING.

I'm impressed.

UM. WHAT DID DESIRE SAY?

Nothing important.

I'M SORRY I MADE YOU ANGRY.

What are you going to do now?

OUR OLDER SISTER. I'LL ASK HER. AND IF SHE SAYS NO, I'LL ASK DESTINY. AND IF HE SAYS NO I'LL GO AND LOOK ON MY OWN.

I CAN DO IT ON MY OWN IF I WANT TO.

IT'S JUST I MIGHT GET DISTRACTED, AND I GET LOST KIND OF EASILY, AND SOMETIMES I HAVE REALLY BAD DAYS...

...WHEN, YOU KNOW, I JUST WANT TO HIDE OR SCREAM OR BLEED OR SOMETHING, AND... ALL THAT...

Hmm. Lucien?

LORD.

Lucien. You remember my sister?

INDEED. A PLEASURE, MA'AM.

YOU'VE GOT POINTY EARS.

INDEED.

Lucien, I will be taking a short journey, with my sister.

If any matters arise that require my attention, please feel free to contact me.

VERY GOOD, LORD.

We'll be travelling in the Waking World. Let Pharamond know that we will be calling on him. I trust that he still oversees transportation?

I HAVE HEARD NOTHING TO THE CONTRARY, LORD.

Good.

YOU MEAN YOU'LL ACTUALLY COME WITH ME? AND LOOK FOR HIM? HONESTLY?

OH. WOW.

Yes.

MY LORD? MIGHT I HAVE A BRIEF WORD WITH YOU?

Certainly, Lucien.

IF YOU'LL FORGIVE MY SPEAKING PERHAPS A LITTLE BLUNTLY, LORD...

DO YOU REALLY FEEL THAT THIS IS A WISE COURSE OF ACTION?

My brother had his reasons for leaving, Lucien. He desires his privacy, and I respect his wishes.

Because I need something to take my mind off my recent misadventure, perhaps?

Because it has been a long time since I walked abroad.

We will not find him.

THEN, WHY...?

And because I wish to.

VERY GOOD, LORD.

AND YOU WILL BE BACK...?

When Delirium loses interest in the quest, as she will.

Or, when I lose interest, and feel I am ready to return.

OR WHEN YOU HAVE FOUND YOUR BROTHER?

It won't happen.

MY LORD, ARE YOU SURE THIS IS WISE?

It will be a brief diversion, Lucien. Nothing more.

We will see a few people, a few sights. I am but a step away from the Dreaming should you need me here.

I see no reason to worry.

"You worry too much, Lucien. I've noticed this before.

"After all, this is completely straightforward. What could possibly go wrong?"

"WHATEVER YOU SAY, LORD.

"WHATEVER YOU SAY."

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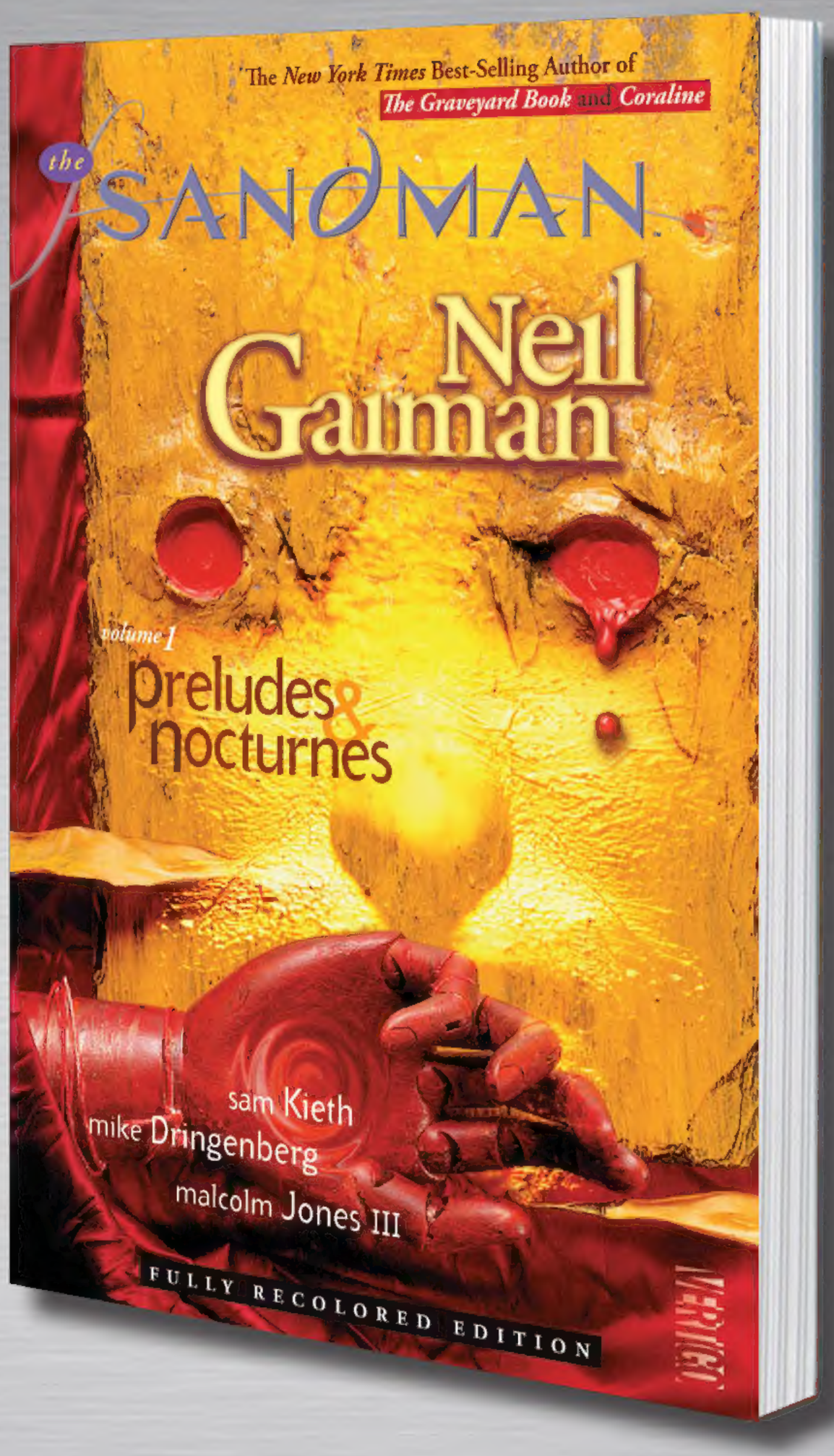

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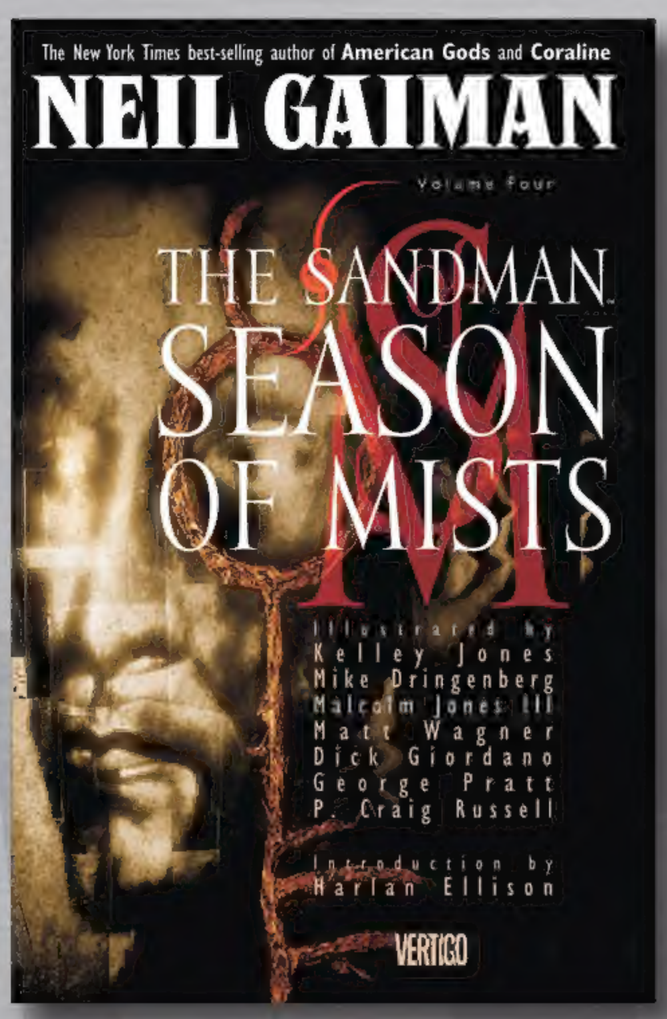

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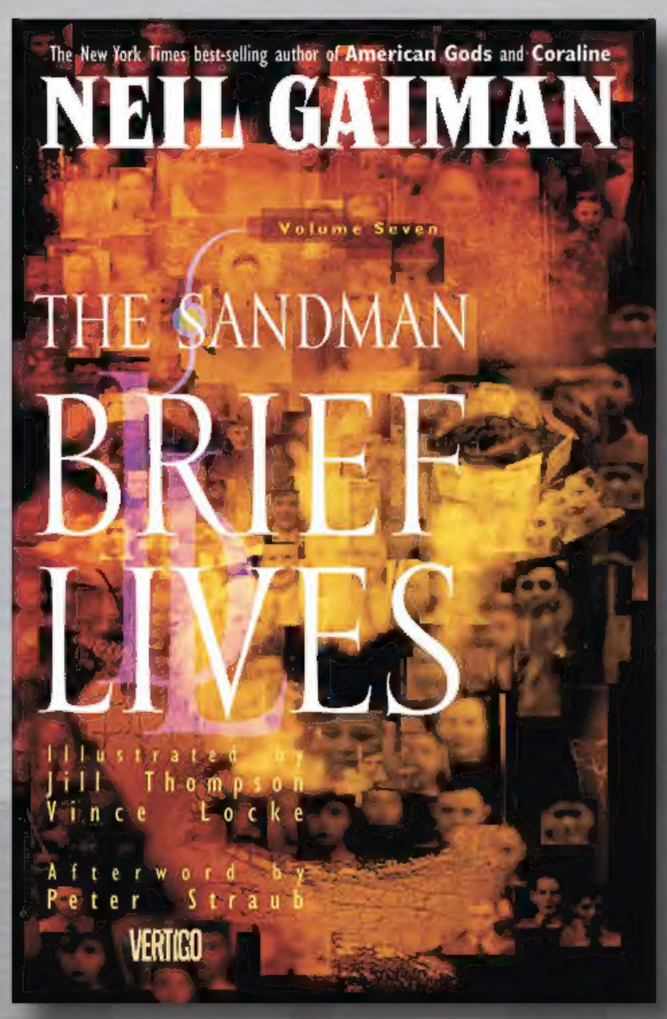

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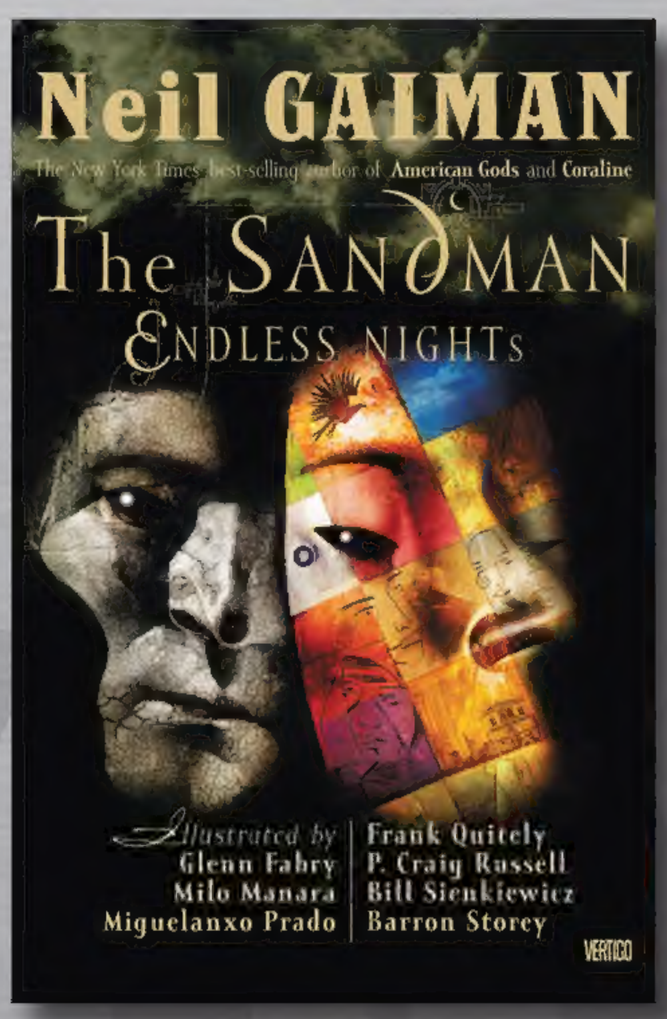

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